

Organic Advisory Board
of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
Division of Agriculture and Resource Marketing

Minutes of Public Meeting of September 26, 2013

Meeting Location: RI DEM
Conference Room 300
235 Promenade Street
Providence, RI 02908

Members Present: Dan Lawton, Skip Paul, Robert Mastin, Scott Marshall

Members Absent: None (organic livestock producer position vacant)

Staff Present: Ken Ayars, Matt Green (RIDEM/Agriculture), Nicole Pollock (RIDEM Legislative Liaison)

Others Present: State Representative Teresa Tanzi; Joseph V. Masino (for U.S. Congressman James R. Langevin); Maria Mack; Max Hence; Sanne Kure-Jensen (NOFA/RI); Heather Faubert (URI Cooperative Extension)

The meeting began at 11:02 a.m. at DEM, 235 Promenade Street, Providence, RI. A quorum of board members was present.

Dan Lawton made a motion, seconded by Robert Mastin, to approve the minutes from the OAB meeting of December 3, 2012, without corrections. The motion was approved unanimously.

The possible surrender of certifier accreditation by RIDEM and the NOP 2012 accreditation renewal on-site audit of RIDEM were discussed. Ken Ayars gave a summary of the organic program history, and the background of the Organic Advisory Board as a board voluntarily established to facilitate public input to the DEM organic program. Ken informed of the 2012 audit results which had been received from NOP that identify several noncompliances related to the fact that certification activities were not able to be carried out in the required time frame—application reviews, inspections, issuance of notices and certification decisions—as a result of deficiencies in available staff levels and resources. Also discussed were the recently issued NOP Instructions and the resulting impact of additional staffing requirements in order to comply.

Maria Mack submitted and presented a letter titled, “Loss of Organic Certification Program.” Another letter was referenced which had been submitted to RIDEM by the Rhode Island Nursery and Landscape Association (RINLA) expressing concern about the possible elimination of the RIDEM organic certification program. Both letters were in support of saving the RIDEM organic certification program.

Suggestions made by attendees included involving non-profit, university or other organizations in collaboration to continue to conduct organic certification in the state.

Skip Paul made a motion requesting DEM to create a letter to USDA stating that RIDEM is working to correct program deficiencies and address noncompliances with the intention of saving the organic certification program. Robert Mastin seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

The option for obtaining organic certification through private organic certifiers was discussed, along with examples of other certifiers' fees. Also discussed was the net cost to certified operations after USDA organic certification cost-share reimbursement, which RIDEM will continue to administer to certified organic producers in RI.

Matt Green informed of existing instructions contained in the National Organic Program Handbook which apply to certified operators changing certifiers: NOP 2604 Instruction—Responsibilities of Certified Operations Changing Certifying Agents, effective 9/25/12, and informed of instructions which apply to certifiers responding to noncompliances: NOP 2608: Responding to Noncompliances, effective 1/13/12, in relation to RIDEM's required response to NOP.

Matt Green informed that the USDA organic certification cost-share program for 2012-2013 administered by the Division was in the stage of accepting applications from producers eligible for reimbursement of a percentage of their certification costs incurred from 10/1/12 through 9/30/13. \$15,000 was allocated by USDA to RI for 2012-2013, and \$9,000 for 2013-2014 to reimburse crops and livestock producers through the AMA cost share program. No cost share funding is available for handlers under current USDA cost share programs, as the previous National cost share program, which reimbursed handlers in RI, no longer exists.

Dan Lawton informed of activities of NOFA/RI related to specialty crop grants: Grower Workshops which continue to be well-attended on organic farms, and the Organic Crop Advisor program. An informational meeting on the FSMA is to be scheduled.

The next OAB meeting was not scheduled.

The meeting adjourned at 12:36 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Matt Green
Environmental Scientist
RIDEM Division of Agriculture